In the Claims:

Please amend the claims as indicated below. This listing of claims replaces all prior versions.

1. (Currently amended) A communication network comprising one or more interconnected data switches, each of the interconnected data switches having I/O ports and at least one virtual port, characterized in that the communication network is configured and arranged to subject ~~subjects~~ said I/O ports and said at least one virtual port to one contention resolution process common to the I/O ports and the at least one virtual port.

2. (Original) The communication network according to claim 1, wherein the at least one virtual port is a virtual input port or a virtual output port.

3. (Original) The communication network according to claim 1, wherein the at least one virtual port is an internal virtual port or an external virtual port.

4. (Original) The communication network according to claim 1, wherein the at least one virtual port is an addressable virtual port.

5. (Original) The communication network according to claim 1, wherein the at least one virtual port is coupled to at least one resource.

6. (Original) The communication network according to claim 5, wherein the at least one resource is an internal or external resource.

7. (Original) The communication network according to claim 6, wherein the at least one resource comprises one or more of the following means: means for testing, means for debugging, means for programming, means for configuring.

8. (Original) The communication network according to claim 7, wherein the at least one

resource are means for one of the associated data switches.

9. (Previously presented) A data switch for application in a communication network that includes one or more interconnected data switches, the data switch comprising I/O ports and at least one virtual port, characterized in that the I/O ports and the at least one virtual port are subjected to one contention resolution process common to the I/O ports and the at least one virtual port.

10. (Previously presented) A method for contention resolution in a communication system that includes one or more interconnected data switches, each of the interconnected data switches having I/O ports and at least one virtual port, the method comprising subjecting the I/O ports and the at least one virtual port to one contention resolution process common to the I/O ports and the at least one virtual port.

11. (Previously presented) The data switch according to claim 9, further comprising an internal resource that performs a function associated to the data switch, the function including at least one of testing, debugging, programming and configuring of the data switch, wherein the at least one virtual port is an internal port and the at least one virtual port is coupled to the internal resource.

12. (Previously presented) The data switch according to claim 9, wherein the at least one virtual port is an external port and the at least one virtual port is coupled to an external resource that performs a function associated to the data switch, the function including at least one of testing, debugging, programming and configuring of the data switch.

13. (Previously presented) The data switch according to claim 9, wherein the at least one virtual port is an addressable virtual port.

14. (Previously presented) The data switch according to claim 9, wherein the one contention resolution process treats contention at the at least one virtual port as contention on one of the I/O ports.

15. (Previously presented) The data switch according to claim 9, wherein the one contention resolution process resolves contention resulting from an output port of the I/O ports being addressed by two or more input ports of the I/O ports and the one contention resolution process resolves contention resulting from the at least one virtual port being addressed by two or more input ports of the I/O ports.

16. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 10, wherein the one contention resolution process treats contention at the at least one virtual port as contention on one of the I/O ports.

17. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 10, wherein the one contention resolution process resolves contention resulting from an output port of the I/O ports being addressed by two or more input ports of the I/O ports and the one contention resolution process resolves contention resulting from the at least one virtual port being addressed by two or more input ports of the I/O ports.

18. (Previously presented) The communication network according to claim 1, wherein the one contention resolution process treats contention at the at least one virtual port as contention on one of the I/O ports.

19. (Previously presented) The communication network according to claim 1, wherein the one contention resolution process resolves contention resulting from an output port of the I/O ports being addressed by two or more input ports of the I/O ports and the one contention resolution process resolves contention resulting from the at least one virtual port being addressed by two or more input ports of the I/O ports.